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cinema, are becoming increasingly important, the principal amusements of the Maltese still generally have some connection with their religious ceremonies. The French Consul in Malta at the beginning of the last century described this enjoyment of religion with great eloquence:

> Le Maltais a de la religion au fond de l'âme; cette religion, dont il remplit les devoirs sans ostentation, il l'aime autant plus qu'elle prend sa source, non seulement dans une foi sincère, mais encore dans cette habitude, contractée dès l'enfance, de chercher au sein des cérémonies religieuses un délassement, que les autres peuples trouvent dans les spectacles et les réjouissances publiques.[1]

People from all parishes come to take part in the diocesan celebrations of St. Joseph the Worker, Corpus Christi and Christ the King. These rallies and processions are usually held in Valletta and Floriana. The national festival of St. Paul's Shipwreck in February, which is also the titular feast of a Valletta parish, draws many people into the city. Another national feast commemorates the lifting of the great Turkish siege in 1565. This feast coincides with that of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary on September 8, and is celebrated with boat races and other aquatic competitions in the Grand Harbour. But the traditional national festivals for the country people are the feasts of St. Gregory in April and SS. Peter and Paul (*L-Imnarja*) in June. Though most of the pageantry of the former has been abolished, the custom of going for a picnic to Marsaxlokk, the little village just beyond the terminal point of the procession in Żejtun, lingers on. On the occasion of the feast of SS. Peter and Paul, thousands proceed to the Buskett, Malta's only wood, where they spend most of the night before the feast eating, drinking and singing. On the feast day they throng to see the agricultural show in the Buskett, the religious procession in Mdina and the bareback horse races that take place just outside Rabat. While these two feasts are the occasions for special outings for the villagers, they are generally looked upon as very low affairs by many from the professional and middle classes.

The principal religious spectacles, however, are those which are organized at the village level. During the course of a year in Kortin, for example, there are fourteen major celebrations and

[1] M. Miège, *Histoire de Malte* (3 vols., Paris, Paulin, 1840), III, 168.

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each association, including the religious ones.[1] The committee forwarded the names of the representatives of its three constituent clubs to Dun Bert. After some time, when they had received no reply from him, they wrote to the Archbishop. Finally, some two months later, Dun Bert wrote back that he could not accept any member of a political party committee on the parish council. This was clearly aimed at the secretary of the band club, who was a very active member of the Labour Party committee, the only political committee in the village. He was not willing to step down, and the other members of the committee supported his decision. The rest of the village slowly lost interest in the matter. The parish priest thus had his way, and is still in full control of the feast.

Many are still bitter about the manner in which their request to take a more active part in the organization of their feast was suppressed, but most have accepted it. They miss not so much the old festa committee, the members of which most people criticized freely, as the feeling they had had of all working together for the greater glory of the village. The members of the old committee at least had the virtue of being from the village, and were as anxious as the next person to celebrate the biggest and best feast in Malta, or so I was often told. Although no one suggested that the parish priest is anything but scrupulously honest, they consider that as an outsider, he does not have the same keen interest in their feast, and in the reputation of the village. Others, less charitable, accuse him of being hungry for power and anxious to enrich himself with his fees as procurator of the festa. Many also spoke to me with regret of the passing of the annual fairs, which the parish priest has not attempted to run on his own. The fairs were exciting occasions on which young and old, rich and poor, competed against each other in games of chance and raffles to win back the rabbits and chickens which they had previously donated to the festa. They say they miss the sense of unity that the fairs brought them. 'In those days we knew each other better,' one priest remarked. 'With the fair some of the poetry of the village was destroyed.' Perhaps, without expressing it in quite this fashion, the organizers of the committee, in their own way, were also seeking this lost poetry.

[1] Such parish councils have from time to time been established in some of the larger villages and towns, but most of them came to threaten the authority of the parish priests, who therefore disbanded them.

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578 621 793 794 Curia trying to persuade all concerned, from the Bishop down, to think the way they do. This may go on for years, for the Curia, knowing the trouble that lies ahead, is usually in no hurry to give its decision. When the final decision is handed down, it is usually favourable, and the design for a set of flowers less beautiful and costly than the corresponding set of the titular partit is furnished. The secondary partit then instructs the craftsmen to begin work. The titular partit announces to everyone that it will cancel its next feast.

It often happens, however, that just before the new bouquets (or whatever *objets d'art* are concerned) are inaugurated during the secondary festa, the parish priest discovers that most of the Curia's specifications have been ignored. The new flowers are far more beautiful than they were supposed to be. He is furious. The guilty leaders of the secondary partit apologize profusely and take immediate steps to make them less beautiful. Occasionally, the priest may discipline the partit by temporarily reducing the scale of its feast. The secondary partit then holds its feast, and the flowers are admired by all visitors. Strong police reinforcements usually prevent trouble from occurring. Relations between the parish priest and the titular partit are gradually re-established and it agrees, usually for some concessions on his part, to celebrate its feast again. But in a year or so, a new dispute occurs, and the process starts all over again.

578 621 625 793 794 Sometimes relations between a parish priest and a partit reach a deadlock that can be broken only by an outside peacemaker, frequently an officer of the police. The police in any case have a vital interest in the degree of rivalry existing in the villages, as it is their business to keep order during the feast. The number of police on duty at these times ranges from a dozen or so in villages such as Siġġiewi and Naxxar, where there are no partiti, to around 100 in those where there are strong ones, such as Mqabba and Żurrieq. Occasionally a parish priest is threatened, frightened by a home-made bomb, or attacked; he then often requests, and generally receives, a transfer to another parish.

543 578 578 621 So far only the more important encounters between partiti have been discussed. There are many other events to keep their rivalry alive throughout the year. The numerous fund-raising fairs of the band clubs are occasions for the village to divide along festa partit lines. While supporters of the partit running the fair flock

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to it, their rivals invariably stage their own fair or, and this is more usual, hire several buses and noisily leave the village for a picnic or a pilgrimage to some shrine of their saint. Many other incidents divide groups and associations along partit lines. For example, a former head teacher of the Farrug school told me that he had once tried to get the girls to wear the dark blue hair ribbons which are supposed to be part of their school uniforms. He was astounded when half the girls flatly refused. It was then explained to him that blue is the colour of the St. Roque partit, so the St. Martin girls could not be expected to wear it.

Let us now look at some of the major skirmishes which have taken place in Farrug during the last ten years. During 1952 and 1953 there was a dispute over an attempt by the St. Roque procession to pass along a street over which St. Martin's followers claimed exclusive rights. When the inexperienced new parish priest backed the St. Roque claim before the Archbishop, he brought violently into the open a dispute over which his predecessor had successfully procrastinated for years. The followers of St. Martin not only refused to celebrate their feast, but also succeeded in frightening the unfortunate priest rather badly by exploding a huge rocket in the drainpipe under his house. Some St. Martin partisans gleefully recounted to me that the priest was soon transferred to another parish, and that during his last week in Farrug he had asked the police to escort him between his house and the church. Relations between the Church and the St. Martin partit were restored when the Archbishop modified the St. Roque procession route.

In 1956 the St. Martin Band Club refused to celebrate the titular festa because the Archbishop had given the Confraternity of St. Roque permission to renew the four bunches of artificial flowers which decorate the main altar during his feast. The following year the St. Roque Band Club refused to play at the installation ceremony of the new parish priest because the Curia had just turned down the confraternity's request for permission to hang a new picture over its altar. In 1960 the same priest angered the St. Roque partit by refusing to let it participate in the St. Martin centenary celebrations. The poor man's hands were tied, for the St. Martin club had declared that it would have nothing to do with the feast if its rival took any part in it. At the moment, there is another struggle in the offing. The Confraternity of St. Roque

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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527 hands, whilst the men are either playing their favourite melodeons or singing, and from group after group the chorus of the gaily dressed young girls rises all along the roads leading to the respective villages.

543 Before leaving the description of this very popular amusement, I think it will not be amiss to say something about the famous *Imnaria* exhibition, which is held every year at Boschetto and is always thoroughly enjoyed by a very large attendance of visitors.

This agricultural show, which was instituted by Sir William Reid, Governor of Malta, in 1857, is held on the 28th and 29th of June, the eve and the feast day of St. Peter and St. Paul, under the auspices of the "Società Economico-Agraria" and under the patronage of H. E. the Governor of the Island.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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When the gentlemen appointed as judges in the different sections carry out their duties, the exhibition receives the benediction of the church, and the show is then opened to the public. 543

His Excellency visits the exhibition and is received by the President and other officers of the Agricultural Society.

After making a tour round the different sections, the Governor proceeds to the stand where he at once commences the distribution of prizes to the successful exhibitors.

The show is generally a very good one — animals, fruits, grains, cereals, honey, poultry, and vegetables are exhibited. Some of the bulls and cows of Maltese and English breeds cannot but be greatly admired, being truly superb animals.

Of all the objects exhibited none

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

543 perhaps excites more interest to the visitors than the beautiful animals which are considered a great ornament to the show.

Sta. VENERA

796 A similar occasion as that of *Imnaria* is afforded to the never tired merry-makers country-women, on the 4th Sunday of July, the day dedicated to the festival of St. Anne.

As early as 4 o'clock in the morning of this day, scores of carts, loaded with gaily dressed country girls, leave their respective villages and proceed to Sta. Venera, a small church at Hamrun, which is very nicely decorated for the occasion.

[537] Here a sermon on the life of the great saint is preached to the people as-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

sembled, from a wooden pulpit in the open air, near the small chapel. When the sermon is over the jolly country girls take a great delight in the fair which is held along the space in front of the small church, which is blocked up from end to end with temporary booths. 796 537 796 543 [366]

The wares offered for sale are of the simplest description, consisting principally of scapulars, pictures, gay woollen and cotton sashes and handkerchiefs, cheep trinkets, and glass and china of inferior quality; but there is enough colour and glitter to produce a pretty kaleidoscopic effect when touched by the rays of the bright shining sun. 796 543 438

On this morning the scores of vendors of sweetmeats, lemonade, and iced water seem endowed with extra power of throat and lungs for vociferating these refreshing compounds, and the set up [265]

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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796 tables, piled with the castellated erec-
543 tions of honey and almonds, tempt
438 those crowds of country people to spend
265 what they have purposely put by for this annual holiday.

After three or four hours of high revel the wheeled vehicles return home with their jolly occupants singing all along the road.

Sta. MARIA

796 On the 15th of August, the day de-
184 dicated to the Assumption of the B. V. Mary (Santa Maria), nearly all the Island of Malta is *en fête*.

[103] Seven of the twentyfour villages, that is:—Casals Musta, Dingli, Attard, Crendi, Micabiba, Asciak and Gudia celebrate on this day their titular feast with the usual illuminations, fireworks and processions.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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Str. Reale, from Fort St. Elmo to Porta Reale, is aglow with the red and white colours of Malta and knights' flags; and at night is ablaze with thousands of variegated lights.

St. George's Square—opposite the Governor's Palace—is ornamented with splendid clusters of flags, pennons, gonfalons, shields, battle axes, spears, captured cannons and some entire suits of armour, kindly lent from the Palace collection. These suits create great interest, being the original property of the knights, some of the pieces bearing the evidence of shots and sabre cuts.

From the various stands, selected national bands fill the city with sweet music, and in the evening elaborate fire-works illustrate the figures and deeds of the knights.

In connection with this feast, horse